

RIVER BIRCH

Betula nigra L.

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Red birch, Black birch, Water birch.

FORM: Usually 50-60 feet tall, may attain a height of 80 feet or more; trunk short, usually dividing near the base into a few divergent ascending limbs, eventually form a round-topped, irregular crown.

BARK: Varies with the age and location on the tree; reddish-brown, roughened by fissures at the base of old trees; on younger trunks and upper part of older ones, peels off in thin papery, reddish-brown to greenish-brown scales.

TWIGS: Slender, at first hairy and greenish; later smooth, reddish-brown.

LEAVES: Alternate, simple, broadly oval, 1 1/2-3 inches long, 1-2 inches wide, wedge-shaped at the base, apex pointed, doubly toothed on the margin, dark green above, yellowing-green below.

FLOWERS: Appear before the leaves; monoecious, but usually on the same branch; staminate formed in the fall, remaining over winter as aments 3/4 inch long, usually in clusters of three, which elongate to 2-3 inches the following spring; pistillate aments develop in the spring from buds below the staminate flowers.

FRUIT: Cone-like, erect, 1 1/2-2 inches long, consisting of 3-lobed finely hairy scales which bear small, hairy winged nuts; terminal lobe of the scales longer than the laterals.

WINTER BUDS: Alternate, ovoid, acute, lustrous, and bright chestnut-brown in winter; inner scales strap-shaped.

WOOD: Light, medium hard, strong, close-grained, light brown with pale sapwood.

USES: Pulp, fuel. Historical uses: furniture, woodwork.

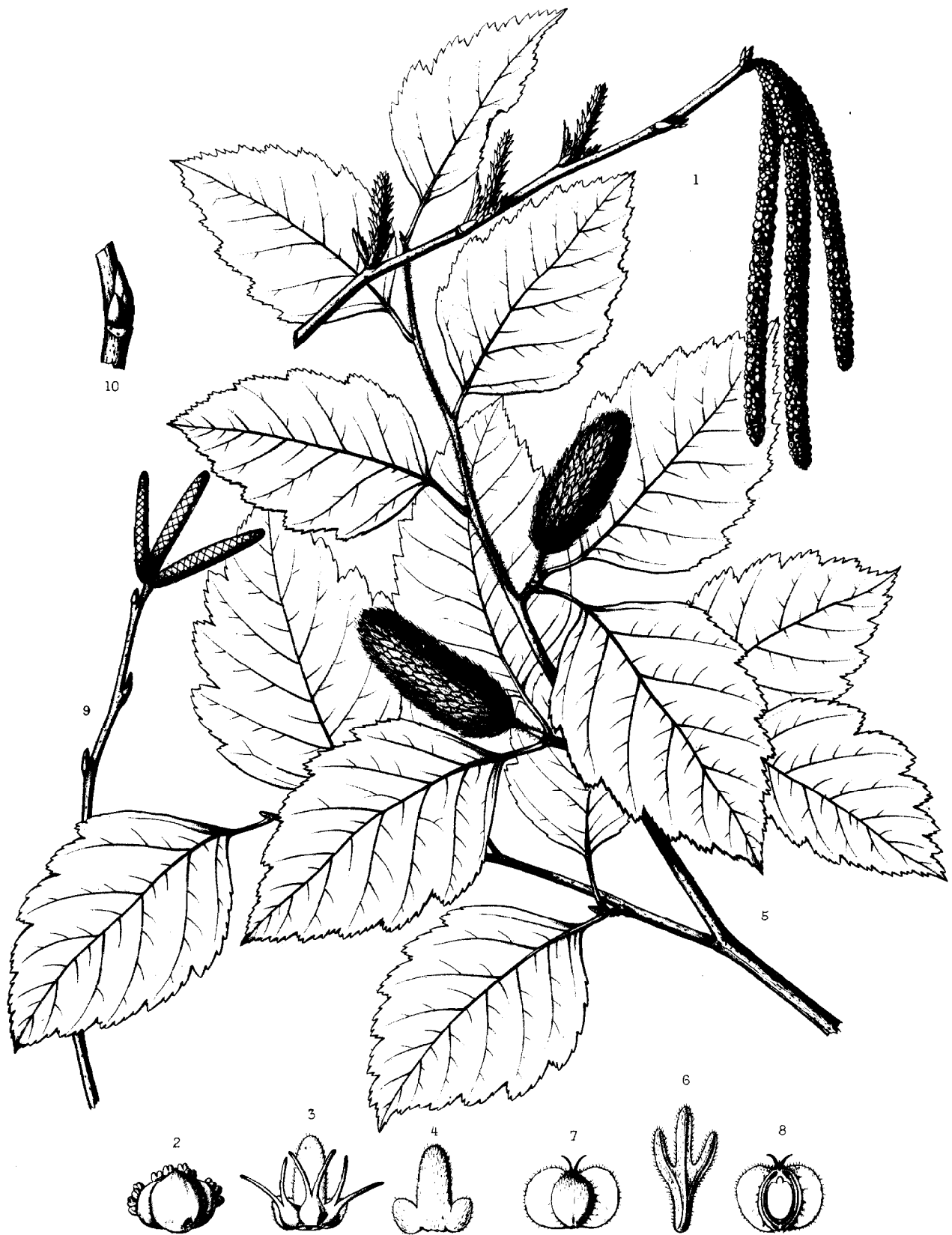
HABITAT: Prefers banks of streams, lakes and swamps, occasionally in drier places.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS: Reddish-brown, or cinnamon-red bark, which peels off in thin papery scales; twigs reddish-brown; wings of the nutlets narrower than the nutlets.

DISTRIBUTION IN ALABAMA: Pretty well throughout the state, along rivers and creeks.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE

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| 1. A flowering branch | 5. A fruiting branch |
| 2. Scale of a staminate ament, rear view | 6. Scale of a strobile |
| 3. Pistillate flowers with their scale, front view | 7. A nut |
| 4. Scale of pistillate ament, rear view | 8. Vertical section of a nut |
| | 9. A winter branch with staminate flowers |
| | 10. A sterile winter bud |



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